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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR



A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Wednesday, April 11, 1934.

MR. SALISBURY: Well, Miss Van Deman, what's on your Household Calendar today? Spring menus, or spring housecleaning, or more about spring clothes?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, all of them and more. But before I get down to business, let me tell you what I did this morning to celebrate spring, before it started to rain. While I was thinking out this Household Calendar talk I went down to the Tidal Basin and walked under the cherry trees. To me they're at their loveliest right now. All full of pink buds, ready to pop open at the touch of a little more sunshine and warm air.

Well, I know it's rather a long jump from Japanese cherry trees to quality standards for the various commodities we buy and use every day in our homes. But all the same that's what I was thinking about as I walked. For Ruth O'Brien and Medora Ward of the Bureau of Home Economics have just brought together and printed a summary of facts about standards and grades for foods, textiles, household equipment, and so on. The Consumers' Advisory Board of the NRA asked them to do it, because grades and standards have a very important bearing on codes and trade agreements. So they tried to find out about all the work of this kind done by national agencies as well as by the Federal Government.

The idea of quality grades to help consumers buy intelligently is a subject that comes close home to many of us. I know I've been very much interested in the letters many of you have written about the labels on silks -- marking the pure-dye and the weighted fabrics -- and the tags on cotton goods showing you which are color-fast and preshrunk.

Your letters back me up in something I said at a conference of editors up at Cornell in February. As we sat around the fireplace in the new Martha Van Rensselaer Hall, which New York State is so proud of, we were talking over what kind of facts we believe women want when they go to the store to do their buying. One of the magazine editors questioned whether women care about labels on sheets for instance. Can women buyers, she asked, understand such terms as thread count, pure finish, tensile strength, and other points that give definite facts on the real quality of the fabric. Will the grade idea ever go over in buying textiles, and canned goods, and other household commodities.

Well, I surely think it will. And I know many of you think so, too. We've added vitamins and calories and dozens of other scientific words to our vocabulary in the last few years. And we're adding more all the time that are a lot harder to pronounce and understand than tensile strength. And certainly there's nothing very mysterious or difficult to understand about a grading system that's based on the A B C plan. Yes, literally that. A to indicate the highest grade, B the second, and C, the third. Or for some commodities the grades bear numbers -- 1, 2, 3, or words like prime, choice, and good.

(over)

AS I LOOKED OVER this material of Miss O'Brien's and Miss Ward's I was surprised to see how far the idea of grading or standardizing commodities to aid wholesale buyers particularly has spread already. Just running through the pages I counted 59 different products on which some kind of quality grades are in use. As I went down the list I began to think I was reading Alice in Wonderland. You remember how the rhyme goes:

"The time has come, the Walrus said,
To speak of many things:
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax
Of cabbages and kings."

Well, believe it or not, this list of products on which some steps have been taken toward grading or standardization includes butter, bedsteads, cheese, gloves, dried beans, rabbits, honey, mopsticks, olives, wall paper, coal, funeral merchandise, and watchcases. Those are just a few picked at random from the 59.

Many times on these Farm and Home Hour programs you have heard how the Department of Agriculture is helping both producers and consumers by setting up grades for food products. Maybe you buy regularly the butter bearing a U.S. certificate of quality. It means that this butter officially scored 92 or above. Millions of pounds of this graded "certified" butter go over the counters in retail stores every year. And have you looked to see whether your meat dealer carries the beef marked "U.S. Good Steer", or one of the other marks that indicates quality. By the way, don't mix these trademarks with the little round purple stamp that says "U.S. Inspected and Passed." That means something else again. That's the mark that has to do with the wholesomeness of the meat, not with quality grade.

The grading of milk and cream is largely a State or local matter. You can find out what system, if any, prevails in your community from your State or local board of health.

The egg grading idea goes from coast to coast. In San Francisco and Los Angeles and in New York, Baltimore, and Washington, and hundreds of places in between, you can buy eggs in sealed cartons with the label "U.S. Specials" or "U.S. Extras." This seal bears the date on which the inspector examined and graded the eggs. So they're dated as well as graded eggs.

Now on the textiles and clothing, as I've remarked a number of times before. You can find precious few labels that give real facts about quality. In the advertisements for a few silk stockings I've recently noticed the gauge mentioned. But until I know whether No. 45 gauge indicates a good or a poor quality, this is all Greek to me.

The situation on bed blankets is a trifle better, but only a trifle. In 1931, the National Retail Dry Goods Association requested the cooperation of the Bureau of Standards on a system of labeling wool and part-wool blankets. The blanket manufacturers and representatives of the various trade groups came and sat around a table and worked out this scheme. I'll put it in my own language and just give you only the high points. To carry the label "All wool" a bed blanket must be 98 percent wool. The blanket can't carry the word

"wool" at all, if it contains less than 5 percent wool. The ones in between that may have 5 to 25 percent or more of wool and the rest something else are also provided for. The spring of the year isn't exactly a blanket-buying season, but next time you're looking at blankets in the stores see whether this system carries through to the stock there. It may, or it may not. There's nothing obligatory about it.

For some years now the American Gas Association has owned and operated two laboratories for testing gas appliances according to very carefully set up standards to insure safety. This is an excellent service, tieing in Government departments, technical societies, and trade and consumer organizations. The laboratory seal of approval of the American Gas Association really means something.

And I could mention others that do, but I see time is up for today. If you're interested in this subject of guides for household buying write to me, and I'll give you the complete references on the subject.

MR. SALISBURY: Wait a minute, Miss Van Deman. Aren't you going to tell us how to standardize cherry pie? I hear I missed something last week when you and Mr. Beattie cut that cherry pie. Stanley Bell here tells me it was good to the last crumb, bottom crust and all.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, there didn't seem to be enough left to feed the office mouse, when we all got through. The secret of a crisp under-crust on a cherry pie, you know, is just baking it first for a few minutes, before the filling goes in. But far be it from me to standardize cherry pies, or grade them either.

Goodbye, everybody, until next time.

